

# A Revelation of the Inward: Schleiermacher's Theology and the Hermeneutics of Interiority

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## Introduction

For nearly two centuries, the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher has provoked controversy. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, theologians have debated, sometimes intensely, the meaning and applicability of Schleiermacher's contribution for modern theology. Sympathy with Schleiermacher's theology has often composed the dividing line between liberal and conservative, orthodox and heterodox. For example, Stephen Neill told the story of J. C. Thirlwall, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, who ran afoul with authorities in the Anglican church in 1825 for translating Schleiermacher's *Essay on the Gospel of Luke*. As a result of his translation of Schleiermacher, Thirlwall was denied the bishopric of Norwich, due to suspicions about his orthodoxy. Several years later, when the see at St. David's was vacated, Lord Melbourne requested an interview with Thirlwall in order to confirm Thirlwall's orthodoxy. Neill recounted, "The Prime Minister received Dr. Thirlwall in his bedroom; after an interview of some length, Melbourne turned to his departing guest and said: 'I have done you a favor by presenting you with a bishopric; now I want you to do me a favor in return.' ...Melbourne continued: 'What the devil made you translate Schleiermacher?' History has, alas," Neill wrote, "concealed the answer to the question."<sup>1</sup> Few theologians have felt apathetic about the theology of

Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher forces theologians to declare their commitments about modernity, historical criticism, and theological method. Widely acclaimed as "the father of modern theology," Friedrich Schleiermacher irrevocably changed the terms of modern theological debate. No one can afford to ignore Schleiermacher.

Schleiermacher's influence has, at times, turned up in rather surprising places. At the close of the nineteenth century, conservative evangelical theologians began to look to Schleiermacher for inspiration. In the Southern Baptist tradition, E. Y. Mullins drank deeply from the well of Schleiermacher's thought. Mullins incorporated Schleiermacher's emphasis on feeling and experience into his own system, and significantly altered the course of twentieth century Southern Baptist theology. Although Mullins expressed disappointment with Schleiermacher's position on Scripture, he praised Schleiermacher's success in "harmonizing the rationalistic and supernaturalistic tendencies" in religion.<sup>2</sup> Mullins appreciated Schleiermacher's location of epistemological claims within the self-consciousness. By doing this, Mullins thought, Schleiermacher protected Christian truth claims from the challenges of skeptical empiricism. Summing up Schleiermacher's contribution, Mullins asserted, "Schleiermacher restored Christianity to the inner life of men.... Christian consciousness [was] henceforth to be reck-

oned with as a new force. The witness of the spirit within was of the utmost importance—experience and not theory [became] the basis of certainty.”<sup>3</sup> “Schleiermacher restored the experience to its place as an authority,” Mullins concluded, “and legitimized mysticism in the Christian churches—hitherto this only a mere sect. Now all are mystics.”<sup>4</sup> Mullins’ reorientation of the theological task around experience changed the course of Southern Baptist theology, and subsequently helped to produce a populist theology among Southern Baptists which extolled the importance of feeling and experience. None of this would have been possible without the impact of Schleiermacher’s theological contribution. Although Schleiermacher’s thought remains one of the most complex contributions in the history of systematic theology, some of his ideas nonetheless have received wide popular acceptance, even though Schleiermacher himself stays unacknowledged as the source.

After Karl Barth declared in “The Strange New World Within The Bible” that “One can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice,” some observers declared the obsolescence of Schleiermacher’s theology. Conventional wisdom held that Barth and Brunner dealt a decisive deathblow to Schleiermacher’s anthropocentric theological method. But as the influence of neo-orthodoxy has waned at the end of the twentieth century, current scholars have declared the profound and ongoing influence of Schleiermacher on both the church and the academy. Perhaps more than any other modern theologian, Schleiermacher’s ideas have found the most wide-ranging acceptance in the popular theological imagination. Unfortunately for Schleier-

macher, he has often remained unrecognized by those who have appropriated his theology. Schleiermacher inherited the epistemology of the Enlightenment and offered a subjectivist account of theology to his culture. Although Schleiermacher ultimately failed to persuade the “cultured despisers of religion” of the value of religion during his own time, he nonetheless greatly influenced a subsequent generation of church leaders and lay people who, like Schleiermacher placed heavy emphasis upon personal experience as the guiding norm for theology. Schleiermacher’s long shadow falls across many theological traditions, in both the liberal ones that praise him, and the conservative ones unaware of his influence.

### **Personal Background**

“If one should imagine both a religious interest and a scientific spirit,” wrote Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1830, “conjoined in the highest degree and with the finest balance for the purpose of theoretical and practical activity alike, that would be the idea of ‘a prince of the Church.’”<sup>5</sup> Throughout his theological career, Schleiermacher attempted to be the “prince,” presiding over an entirely new statement of the theological disciplines eminently fit for his age. Schleiermacher sought a theological approach for the new intellectual day asserting itself upon the Church, a method capable of rescuing the theological disciplines from the brute fact of the Enlightenment. Any attempt to reclaim the legitimacy of theology for the educated German needed to meet Enlightenment skepticism on its own terms—and surmount them.

Schleiermacher faced the challenge of reestablishing the importance of dogmat-

ics in an era that hardly believed doctrines mattered. Commenting on the rebellion against authority which marked the “enlightened” mind, Peter Gay observed, “Theirs was a paganism directed against their Christian inheritance and dependent upon the paganism of classical antiquity, but it was also a *modern* paganism, emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Schleiermacher wanted to reclaim theology, but his reclamation proceeded on the terms of modernity. If “classical thought” suffered the same casualties as the doctrinal distinctives of the Christian faith, Schleiermacher thought, then any program for recovery could not prosecute a “conserving” or “conservative” theology. The old metaphysic of Protestantism, asserted in the dogmatic sentences of the Church and summarily deflated by Kant, he held, could not carry the weight placed on the faith. For Schleiermacher, theology at the turn of the nineteenth century stood in shambles, unfit to answer a culture unconvinced by its necessity and unable to support a tottering post-Enlightenment faith. “Piety,” he asserted, “cannot be an instinct craving for a mess of metaphysical and ethical crumbs.”<sup>7</sup>

Schleiermacher’s entire theological contribution served as a search for, articulation of, and systematization of the princely “idea” to which he alluded in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*. Schleiermacher sought to wed the religious spirit to the sensibilities of a scientific age, thereby achieving a new *Begriff*, an organizing idea to rehabilitate theology. Schleiermacher’s successors, despite their internal divisions concerning the success of his theological rescue attempt, admired the scope and sheer comprehensiveness of his renovation of the theologi-

cal task. As Rudolf Otto explained,

No matter what one’s attitude toward Schleiermacher’s method and his utterances on religion may be, one is time and again enthralled by his original and daring attempt to lead an age weary with and alien to religion back to its very mainsprings; and to re-weave religion, threatened with oblivion, into the incomparably rich fabric of the burgeoning intellectual life of modern times.<sup>8</sup>

Despite his well-known condemnation of Schleiermacher’s theological method, Karl Barth esteemed his predecessor’s work. In Barth’s understanding, Schleiermacher remains our contemporary. He writes,

Schleiermacher is not dead for us and his theological work has not been transcended. If anyone still speaks today in Protestant theology as though he was still among us, it is Schleiermacher. We *study* Paul and the reformers, but we *see* with the eyes of Schleiermacher and think along the same lines as he did. This is true even when we criticize or reject the most important of his theologoumena or even all of them.<sup>9</sup>

Schleiermacher offered a theology for moderns—simultaneously obtuse and lucid, rigorously structural, and radically discontinuous with traditional Protestant orthodoxy. At its very core, Schleiermacher’s understanding of the Christian faith reads like an intellectual biography of early modernity. It is inward, monadic, anthropologically absorbed, and unquestionably driven by the *Sitz im Leben* of modern man.

Lest one view Schleiermacher’s theology as a purely altruistic attempt to rescue theology from the prison of Enlightenment rationalism, one needs to understand Schleiermacher’s own per-

sonal situation that gave rise to his radical reinterpretation of the Christian faith. While Schleiermacher sought to prove himself a faithful son of the Church, he did not see himself as a preserver of orthodoxy. Schleiermacher's methodology found its voice early in his theological career. Correspondence between Schleiermacher and his father during his career as a student at the Moravian Seminary at Barby and the University of Halle reveals the profound departure of the theologian from orthodoxy extremely early in his intellectual development. Frustrated with the "traditional doctrines" taught to him at the seminary, Friedrich readied himself for larger pursuits. Despite the protests of Gottlieb Schleiermacher, his son entered Halle and quickly began appropriating his instructors' critique of Protestant theology. Panicked, Gottlieb wrote letters to his son seeking to reclaim him for orthodoxy. Faith in the Gospel traditionally understood by the Church, he argued, is indispensable to one's salvation. Friedrich tortured himself with his father's solemn warnings, but refused to heed them. In a remarkable letter, dated January 21, 1787, the nineteen-year-old Friedrich admitted to his father that the old theology no longer held its sway over his thinking and affections. Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote to his worried father,

Faith is the regalia of the Godhead, you say. Alas! dearest father, if you believe that, without this faith, no one can attain to salvation in the next world, nor to tranquillity in this—and such, I know, is your belief—oh! then pray to God to grant it to me, for to me it is now lost. I cannot believe that He, who called Himself the Son of Man, was the true eternal God: I cannot believe that His death was a vicarious atonement, because

He never expressly said so Himself; and I cannot believe it to have been necessary, because God, who evidently did not create men for perfection, but for the pursuit of it, cannot possibly intend to punish them eternally, because they have not attained it.<sup>10</sup>

With this remarkable phrase, Friedrich Schleiermacher repudiated Christianity. He could not, and would not believe orthodoxy any longer. He never changed that belief. With this critical passage from his own pen, the interpreter of Schleiermacher immediately understands the development of his future theological program. His was no gradual modification of Christian theology, or a mere updating of theological expression in a new linguistic form. Rather, Schleiermacher rejected Protestant theology at its core. He summarily denied the God of the conciliar creeds, and the metaphysics of the biblical worldview. Still, he continued to love the Church. He wanted to see the Church survive and thrive because he felt its piety energized human existence.

Despite all his infidelities, Schleiermacher was not an atheist, customarily defined. He unswervingly held that consciousness of God fundamentally constituted the authentic human being. In reaction to the cold transcendence of Deism, and to maintain a place for God in modernity, Schleiermacher placed God where He would be safe: in self-consciousness (*Selbstbewußtsein*). Schleiermacher's theological system achieved a place for God in piety—but at the expense of theology. Circumscribed by consciousness, Schleiermacher's God sacrificed his metaphysical transcendence, his personhood, and his independent interaction with the world. Given all of this, one may wonder why Schleiermacher did not sacrifice

Christian theology altogether. The answer lies in the fact that Schleiermacher saw in Christian theology a coherence for belief, an area in which pure philosophy ignominiously failed. Schleiermacher saw that philosophy left to itself ignored the essentially religious character of humanity. In his understanding, systematic theology distinguishes an advanced religious belief from lower ones: "None but the subordinate forms of religion and smaller sects fail to aim at completeness."<sup>11</sup> Systematic theology, for Schleiermacher, further legitimizes religion.

Scholars of Schleiermacher's theology largely have avoided the issue of Schleiermacher's early embrace of heterodoxy and its importance for the emergence of his theological system. Perhaps partly driven by an impulse to justify his modernism, or a lack of awareness of his substantive rejection of historic theological positions, Schleiermacher's interpreters offer either approbation or imprecations regarding this great figure's theological method, with the notable exception of one charge: heresy. A term already outdated by means of neglect from eighteenth and nineteenth century German clergy, heresy as a concept ceded to the prevailing spirit of the times. Unless one realizes that his work in *Glaubenslehre* constitutes an apology for Schleiermacher's early, sustained and avowed rebuff of such fundamental doctrines as the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and eternal damnation, one cannot understand Schleiermacher's theological program. Schleiermacher's flirtation with pantheism, his subordination of the doctrine of the Trinity to an appendix in his major expression of theology, and his massive reinterpretation of the doctrines of anthropology and sin stem not merely

from a perceived need for a restatement of Christian themes but from a fundamental desire to reject categorically the orthodox faith of his father, the Reformers, the ecumenical councils, and the Church.

### **The Intellectual and Cultural Background to Schleiermacher's Thought**

Schleiermacher's new vision of Christianity and the theological task grew out of a simultaneous conflict with and embrace of the new worldview produced by the Enlightenment. As a student entering Halle, the demands of a German university immediately confronted the young Schleiermacher. Thrust into an environment in which education meant a comprehensive knowledge of numerous disciplines, Schleiermacher pursued his studies with vigor, demonstrating considerable ability in linguistic and biblical studies. Considerably different from his studies at the Moravian seminary at Barby, life at Halle forced Schleiermacher to confront the major philosophical options prevalent in eighteenth century Germany. Between the time he was a Moravian seminary student and the time he wrote *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher encountered the stolid tradition of German rationalism and the monumental work of Immanuel Kant. This experience altered virtually everything in Schleiermacher's intellectual development. As William C. Fletcher notes, "He immersed himself in the learning of the philosophers, and this gave the direction of his later theology."<sup>12</sup> But Schleiermacher did not follow any system slavishly. He remained critical and distinguished himself far above the order of routine philosophers. As Terrence Tice rightly remarks, "Schleiermacher has had an undeservedly minor place in the

histories of philosophy.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***Schleiermacher and Rationalism at the University of Halle***

The University of Halle achieved a reputation in the eighteenth century for the seminal work of its faculty members Christian Wolff and Johann Semler. Wolff (1679-1754), the University’s premier philosopher and a devoted follower of Leibniz’s philosophy of monadic rationalism, posited the verifiability of knowledge on purely rational and empirical grounds. Wolff rejected the supernatural metaphysics of his pietist background and university, and drew a sharp distinction between language (*Wort*) and reality (*Sache*). According to Wolff, one comes to know the degree of correspondence between word and fact by a rational investigation of their relationship, mediated by the senses. Following both Leibniz and Spinoza, the authority of biblical revelation suffered the greatest casualties on Wolff’s account of truth. As such, Hans Frei remarked, “Among German philosophers, he (Wolff) more than anyone else shaped the conceptual instruments required for liberating principles of explicative meaning from the fetters of pietist reading.”<sup>14</sup> Wolff’s philosophy reflected the height of German rationalistic thinking. By questioning the veracity of biblical references to miracles and history and dismissing any affirmation of them by means of rationalistic and scientific principles, Wolff effectively separated faith from fact, with the implied intention of undermining faith as classically defined altogether.

Johann Semler (1725-1791), who taught theology at Halle in the generation after Wolff, pioneered the use of higher critical views in biblical interpretation.

Combining Wolff’s rationalism with the burgeoning field of biblical criticism, Semler gave rationalism a methodology by which it could deconstruct the biblical truth claim. Intellectually emboldened by the power of a purely scientific worldview, Semler claimed that the age of Enlightenment provided the tools by which the historicity of the biblical accounts could be judged either as adequate or inadequate. Semler concluded that while the Bible does not teach us actual history, it conveys to us important spiritual truths that illumine the true meaning of its words. Theology, Semler explained, comes to an impasse when it consigns its doctrine to the historical conditionedness of the Bible. Rather than relying on a simple application of the literal meaning of Scripture, Semler maintained, the theologian must uncover the affections and sentiments behind the biblical accounts. In this way, truth achieves an actuality in each individual. Lewis White Beck explains Semler’s view by saying,

We use our moral reason and ‘sentiment’ in order to find the ‘true Christian religion’ or the ‘private religion’ (Semler calls it both) which is the same for all Christians.... Thus Semler went beyond ordinary church history and biblical exegesis, which were his professional fields, to achieve the beginnings of an understanding of the development of dogma itself.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding the respective contributions of Wolff and Semler plays a pivotal role in charting the development of Schleiermacher’s thought during his time at the University of Halle. Wolff’s influence was mediated to those of Schleiermacher’s generation by its faithful proponent J. A. Eberhard. Eberhard

advanced a philosophy of pure rationalism, setting forth the proofs for the existence of God as a certain path to metaphysics. Schleiermacher admitted the initial attraction that a Wolffian rationalism held. "For a long time," he reflected in his *Soliloquies*,

I too was content with the discovery of a universal reason; I worshipped the one essential being as the highest, and so believed that there is but a single right way of acting in every situation, that the conduct of all men should be alike, each differing from the other only by reason of his place and station in the world. I thought humanity revealed itself as varied only in the manifold diversity of outward acts, that man himself, the individual, was not a being uniquely fashioned but of one substance and everywhere the same.<sup>16</sup>

Eberhard ultimately did not convince Schleiermacher of rationalism. Schleiermacher viewed Wolff's and Eberhard's rationalism as a failed attempt to justify the pursuit of metaphysics as a prolegomena to theology. Thus, Schleiermacher remarked, "Wolffian language remains unmistakably connected to scholastic language, which was nothing but a confusion of metaphysics and dogmatics."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Wolff's critique of the supernatural elements of Christianity found sympathy in Schleiermacher's thinking. After studying Wolff, Schleiermacher came to the conclusion that a simple return to revelation was not possible. Wolff's rationalism allowed no room for a God to function outside of the world of the mind and the historical process.

For his part, Semler confirmed for Schleiermacher the power of religious sentiment in overcoming the difficulties posed to biblical authority by higher criticism. Semler utilized a critical interface

with pietism to maintain the theological task in the wake of the Enlightenment's refutation of scriptural inerrancy. In addition, Semler offered an explanation as to how individual and public or church piety function mutually to change and develop doctrinal expression.<sup>18</sup> In a significant sense, Semler served as a forerunner for Schleiermacher's theological amalgam of rationalism and pietism.

### *The Influence of Spinoza's Rationalism*

Baruch Spinoza exerted considerable influence on Schleiermacher's life and work. Spinoza, the Dutch rationalist, advanced "panpsychism" in his approach to metaphysics. Panpsychism identifies God and Nature as one substance, and thus eliminates virtually any notion of a distinct personal dimension to the divine being. Spinoza taught that through rational appropriation of the world, the mind perceives the world as it actually is, thereby becoming a "mode of God," an outworking of the divine activity in the world. Schleiermacher opposed Spinoza's purely rationalistic approach to knowledge, but appreciated Spinoza's attempt to locate God in the world. In his *Speeches*, Schleiermacher seems quite favorably disposed to a Spinozaic pantheism. Commenting on the way in which piety surrenders itself to the fabric of the universe, Schleiermacher notes, "here the Universe is put for God and the pantheism of the author is undeniable."<sup>19</sup> Although Schleiermacher came under criticism for his pantheistic comments in both the *Speeches* and the *Glaubenslehre*, he never revised the comments or excised them from his published work.<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher disdained any distancing of God from the world, whether in his self-revealing nature or in

his action in the universe. Schleiermacher saw Spinoza as an ally in this respect, even if he rejected the rationalistic way in which Spinoza sought to resolve the problem. As Richard Brandt put it, "Schleiermacher is most sympathetic with Spinoza's opposition to the theistic idea of a transcendent God."<sup>21</sup>

### ***The Towering Figure of Immanuel Kant***

No other figure so shaped the contours of Schleiermacher's theological method and philosophical outlook more than Immanuel Kant did. As early as his days in seminary at Barby, Schleiermacher digested *The Critique of Pure Reason* and subsequently considered Kant's other major works, including *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. When considering the impact of Kant on Schleiermacher, the careful historian recognizes that Kant was viewed in pietist circles, at least until the publication of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, as a friend to and preserver of orthodoxy. During the days of Schleiermacher's early but pronounced "dark night of the soul," Gottlieb Schleiermacher encouraged his son to turn to Kant for help in undergirding his faith. Worried that his son might accept the explanations of Wolffian rationalism, Gottlieb Schleiermacher wrote, "As you are now attending Eberhard's lectures on metaphysics, I would recommend to you at the same time to study and weigh maturely Professor Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, and also his *Prolegomena of Metaphysics*, so that you may not be adventuring yourself into the boundless desert of transcendental ideas without some safe guide."<sup>22</sup> Upon his father's suggestion, Schleiermacher visited Kant at his home in Königsberg in

May of 1791. Although their meeting was brief, Kant impressed Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher admired the rigor of Kant's philosophical method and subsequently accepted much of Kant's critique against early German Rationalism.

Although a satisfactory summary of Kant's philosophical contribution lies beyond the scope of this essay, the central issues in his thought provide a critical insight into the philosophical method from which Schleiermacher approached the theological task. Kant's program, as widely acknowledged, searched for a bridge between the antiseptic and conflicting epistemologies of rationalism and empiricism. Against empiricism, Kant argued that there are synthetic *a priori* judgments that are necessary to understand reality. These synthetic *a priori* statements do not and cannot derive their truth status from simple observation. In contradiction of rationalism, Kant contended that pure conceptual analysis did not constitute a proper epistemology for metaphysics. For Kant, the inability of pure reason to apprehend "things in themselves" (*noumena*) constitutes a barrier erected against a purely rationalistic account of the world. Consequently Kant argued that only "things as we perceive them" (*phenomena*) make themselves available to our perceptions for apprehension.

Kant's famous "shift to the subject" and the reorientation of epistemological certainty to the thinking subject irrevocably severed metaphysics from an objectivist account of truth. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguished between two approaches to theology, rational and revealed. Revealed theology, he argued, failed to offer an adequate epistemology since its categories hopelessly emanated from the noumenal world. Rational the-

ology suffered from the opposite problem: the fact that pure reason cannot apprehend noumenal categories or “things in themselves.” Still, Kant did not sacrifice reason as the primary conduit through which all theological truth must be known. As a result, Kant concluded, “Now I maintain that all attempts of reason to establish a theology by the aid of speculation are fruitless, that the principles of reason as applied to nature do not conduct to us any theological truths, and, consequently, that a rational theology can have no existence, unless it is founded upon the laws of morality.”<sup>23</sup> Kant thereby constituted a “metaphysics of experience” whereby categories in the noumenal realm must conform themselves to the perceptions of the thinking self. Although “experience can never teach us the nature of things in themselves,” experience serves as the only mediator by which the self can obtain knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Experience, on Kant’s account, does not offer meaning until sense perceptions are formed into concepts which are then judged by the intuitions of the self. He argued that in order for sense perceptions to become knowledge, the intuitions of the mind and concepts must coincide to form judgments. But what unites intuitions and concepts in the mind? The answer is the self-consciousness, what Kant termed the “transcendental unity of apperception.” On this account, all knowledge must pass through the self-consciousness in order for judgments to be possible, and judgments according to Kant, comprise our grasp of truth.

This review of the basic features of Kant’s epistemology form the most critical element to the background of Schleiermacher’s theological method: the

mediating work of the self-consciousness in all apprehensions of truth. Once one understands what Kant means by the “transcendental unity of apperception,” one begins to understand the way in which Schleiermacher forms theological judgments. Schleiermacher gains the explanatory power of consciousness from the seminal work of Kant, and builds an entire theological system around it. Although many intellectual biographers of Schleiermacher note his critique of Kant’s theory of ethics, few have noted his profound indebtedness to Kant’s philosophy for the organizing principle of his developing theological system.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Culture of Romanticism*

Schleiermacher lived, preached, and taught in an age that eschewed an authoritarian account of truth and existence. The traditional domains of German authority—religion and philosophy—suffered the greatest losses during this period. The Romantic era sought an individualized account of reality, and neither the pronouncements of reason or revelation persuaded the minds of culture in which creativity emerged as the highest virtue. If Kant’s philosophy initiated the shift to the self, romanticism extended the notion to idealize self-realization. Regarding the spirit of the age, Jacques Barzun wrote, “Romantic striving may therefore be summed up as the effort to create something out of Experience individually acquired. It is a striving because human experience does not automatically dictate its own forms or point out its own values. That the task of man is to discover these for himself is shown by his possession of energies and desires.”<sup>26</sup> Schleiermacher’s rejection of the traditional German rationalism of Wolff and Leibniz coincided

with a culture that increasingly despised it as well.

Schleiermacher's own colleagues at the University of Halle, Schlegel and Hegel, helped define the distinctive feature of romantic thought, following the seminal work of the idealist philosophers Fichte and Schelling. Schlegel, Schleiermacher's close friend whom he met during his years as preacher at the Charité Hospital in Berlin, introduced him to the romantic ethos by reading the great poets of the age such as Goethe. Schlegel helped Schleiermacher understand the romantic turn away from religion.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, Schlegel's friendship with Schleiermacher greatly contributed to the pointed apologetic genius of the *Speeches*. Because Schleiermacher understood the worldview of the religious "cultured despisers" of romanticism, he was able to offer an "insider's critique" to their objections to religion.

Ironically, the same Schleiermacher who years earlier denied so many central doctrines of the historic Christian faith emerged as the champion for its continuance in the modern world. As William Dilthey observed, "Surrounded by indifference, he began, before anyone else, to assert the great historical task of the Church which many years of preaching, serving the Church and theology had impressed upon him: he became the spiritual head of the Church of his time."<sup>28</sup>

Schleiermacher knew how to appeal to the sensibilities of his romantic audience. The opening pages of the *Speeches* indicate his keen perception, as Schleiermacher reversed the tables on the cult of self-enhancement. If one seeks to achieve the ultimate end to human existence, Schleiermacher argued, one must experience piety and share in the life of God

himself. The life of individual fulfillment so stressed by the cultured despisers, Schleiermacher proposed, could not be attained apart from the very thing they so despised: religion. "In your ornamented dwellings, the only sacred things to be met with are the sage maxims of our wise men, and the splendid compositions of our poets. Suavity and sociability, art and science have so fully taken possession of your minds, that no room remains for the eternal and holy Being that lies beyond the world."<sup>29</sup> Piety, the true expression of God-consciousness, appeared with such infrequency in the post-Enlightenment world, Schleiermacher argued, that only very few attain it. "Religion of such a sort is so rare, that whoever utters anything of it, must necessarily have had it, for nowhere could he have heard it. Of all that I praise, all that I feel to be the true work of religion, you will find little even in the sacred books. To the man who has not himself experienced it, it would be only an annoyance and a folly."<sup>30</sup>

Schleiermacher offered an account of religion that offered the benefits of religion without the strictures of an authoritative interpretative tradition. By locating religious feeling within the consciousness, truth in piety rather than doctrines, Schleiermacher's culture could achieve the self-fulfillment they desired. The life of the pious achieves true greatness due to Christianity's relation to the highest form of self-actualization: the life of Jesus. Schleiermacher's speeches accomplished their intended purpose when they piqued the curiosity of his culture to listen to his account of the Christian faith.

### *Moravian Pietism*

Despite Schleiermacher's rejection of the central theological convictions of his

Moravian background, he salvaged what he thought was the energetic principle of the tradition: piety. Given his appropriation of the cohesive feature of Kant's notion of self-consciousness, Schleiermacher saw a correlation between his own epistemology and the pietism of his Moravian background. Consequently, the explanatory feature of religion consists not primarily in terms of doctrine or missions but in a distinct piety. Since doctrinal proposition no longer formed the center of the theological enterprise, Schleiermacher saw the opportunity to redefine the whole system on an entirely new organizing principle, the religious self-consciousness. As Brian Gerrish observes, "In Schleiermacher's own experience, the religious feeling remained relatively constant; what changed was his explication of it."<sup>31</sup>

In contradistinction to the other branches of the Reformation tradition, two features underscored the pietist theological tradition. First, Pietism expressed a "relative lack of interest in the theological systems of Protestant orthodoxy."<sup>32</sup> Although historic Pietism never encouraged a separation of life from belief, reform of life undeniably received the majority of consideration. Furthermore, pietism stressed the communal nature of theological reflection, with holy living resulting in correct belief. Schleiermacher incorporated this perspective into his understanding of the "development of doctrine" set forth in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, Schleiermacher is careful to state that dogmatic propositions (the pronouncements of the Church) must stand in continuity with the Church's agreed upon statement of doctrines and propositions. This does not mean, however, that dogmatic formu-

lations cannot and will not change. For Schleiermacher, "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" do not refer to some objective, external standard, but rather to the received interpretation of the Christian community.<sup>34</sup> Both participate in a hermeneutical process by which the Church stands in continuity with, but also in freedom from its existing body of statements.<sup>35</sup>

Given this understanding and background to Schleiermacher's thought, one begins to see clearly the path undertaken in his theological method. The *Glaubenslehre* is an exercise in maintaining continuity with the structure of previous church dogmatics while simultaneously reinterpreting the system with an innovative set of guiding principles and a considerably different doctrinal language.

### **Development of Schleiermacher's Theological Method and His Architecture of Thought**

With all of this prolegomena to Schleiermacher's intellectual development, we understand his theological system as an attempt at a fundamental rehabilitation, not only of theology, but also of modern thought. Schleiermacher's theology proposed an answer to the intellectual and cultural challenges of his day while simultaneously claiming continuity with larger church tradition. In order to accomplish this, Schleiermacher invited his hearers to look inward for the fountain of religious truth, into the essence of the religious self-consciousness. In the process, Schleiermacher constructed a tightly construed approach to religious discourse, and interiorized truth in the process. "You must transport yourselves," he told the cultured despisers of religion, "into the interior of a pious soul in order

to understand its inspiration."<sup>36</sup>

This interiorizing of metaphysics required a complementary denouncement of the theological methods that so offended early nineteenth century German culture. Appealing to Romantic prejudices, Schleiermacher eschewed the existing theological propositions found in the systems of Protestant orthodoxy, vilifying them as the "undertakers of vital religion." He writes,

What are all these systems, considered in themselves, but the handiwork of the calculating understanding, wherein only by mutual limitation each part holds its place? What else can they be, these systems of theology, these theories of the origin and end of the world, these analyses of the nature of an incomprehensible Being, wherein everything runs to cold argufying, and the highest can be treated in the tone of common controversy? And this is certainly—let me appeal to your feeling—not the character of religion.<sup>37</sup>

The theologians, Schleiermacher charged, with their dogmatic pronouncements and tightly argued theological proofs, are to be held responsible for the deplorable image of religion. The more they dogmatize, the less they offer by means of explanation of true religion. Caricaturing his opposition for rhetorical purpose, Schleiermacher queried,

Name one among those [theologians] who have brought down any kind of new revelation to us?... You will not blame me if I do not reckon among them the theologians of the letter, who believe the salvation of the world and the light of wisdom are to be found in a new vesture of formulas, or a new arrangement of ingenious proofs.... Doctrine is only united to doctrine only occasionally to remove misunderstanding or expose unreality.<sup>38</sup>

Such statements take on greater meaning when compared with Schleiermacher's early denials of cardinal doctrines such as the deity of Christ, vicarious atonement, and eternal damnation.<sup>39</sup> Schleiermacher's derogatory statements about propositional theology do not refer merely to his disdain for its method, but also disdain for its content. As Schleiermacher extended the ideas initiated in the *Speeches* into systematic theological expression, he constructed the system in such a way as to maintain a grammatical continuity with the confessions of the church without sharing its epistemological or metaphysical presuppositions. Schleiermacher felt as though he could not simply return to the old Protestant metaphysic of Calvin that began with the transcendent God who makes himself known through an externally given, rational, and objective revelation. Reflecting on his proposition that "Dogmatic Theology is the science that systematizes the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time," he remarked,

It is obvious that the text-books of the seventeenth century can no longer serve the same purpose as they did then, but now in large measure belong merely to the realm of historical presentation; and that in the present day it is only a different set of dogmatic presentations that can have the ecclesiastical value which these had then; and the same fate will one day befall the present ones too.<sup>40</sup>

Christian doctrines, therefore, are not objectively revealed by God, but merely "accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, Schleiermacher developed a theological epistemology with internal controls. By locating the confirmation of all truth state-

ments within self-consciousness he interiorized doctrine into a place safe from the harsh objectivity of orthodoxy and the skepticism of the Enlightenment.<sup>42</sup>

The progression of Schleiermacher's theological method unfolds with remarkable consistency, from his early skepticism, to the defense of a newly redefined religion in the *Speeches* and his subsequent *Monologen*, and finally to the systematic expression of his thought in the *Glaubenslehre*. No major shift marked Schleiermacher's theological career. Although he pursued other interests during his teaching career at the University of Berlin, such as the nature of hermeneutics, Schleiermacher focused on a new vision for the theological task with astonishing concentration and devotion.

In developing his alternative system, Schleiermacher dismissed traditional theological and philosophical modes of discourse with one remarkable phrase at the beginning of his *Glaubenslehre*: "The piety which forms the basis for all ecclesiastical communions is, considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness."<sup>43</sup> In this brief statement, Schleiermacher rejected traditional Protestant dogmatics (a knowing), rationalism (a knowing), and Kant's moral solution of practical religion and the ethical accounts of religion (such as Fichte's) which followed him (a doing). Having eliminated the other options, Schleiermacher offered his own proposal, built upon a seemingly invulnerable category (a modification of Feeling, or of the immediate self-consciousness).

In a manner strikingly similar to Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, Schleiermacher's notion of feeling and self-consciousness in the service of piety

serves as the means by which all theological judgments are made and as the bridge between knowing and doing. "For, indeed, it is the case in general that the immediate self-consciousness is always the mediating link in the transition between moments in which Knowing predominates and those in which Doing predominated, so that a different Doing may proceed from the same Knowing in different people according as a determination of self-consciousness enters in."<sup>44</sup> Drawing upon his Moravian background, Schleiermacher roots right belief in piety, not on an external claim based upon an objective revelation. "Accordingly, on the hypothesis in question" he argues, "the most perfect master of Christian Dogmatics would always be likewise the most pious Christian."<sup>45</sup> Schleiermacher goes on to say, "Knowing refers not so much to the content of that knowledge as to the certainty which characterizes its representations."<sup>46</sup>

For Schleiermacher, "there are both a Knowing and a Doing which pertain to piety, but neither of these constitutes the essence of piety."<sup>47</sup> By essence he means that irreducible reality which undergirds the human as a spiritual being. Moving beyond Kant, Schleiermacher gives his cohesive principle an explicitly theological reference, stating, "The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."<sup>48</sup> The feeling of absolute dependence of which Schleiermacher speaks (*das Gefühl Schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit*) refers to the fact "that the locus of religion is the inner-

most realm of human existence."<sup>49</sup>

Schleiermacher uses the terms "feeling of absolute dependence" and "consciousness of God" interchangeably, considering them "an essential element of human nature."<sup>50</sup> This explanation offers an account for how each human being possesses fundamentally the same religious consciousness, thus providing Schleiermacher with a ready-made theology of world religions. On this view, Christianity is the highest level of religion, primarily because its founder exhibited the highest degree of God-consciousness. Although I will have to say more on this in the next section, I note here that for Schleiermacher, given the basic constitution of each person as possessing God-consciousness, all religious systems exist in a continuum with each other. Rather than viewing different religious world-views as discontinuous and antithetical with Christianity, Schleiermacher sees every religious expression as moving inevitably to a Christian God-consciousness, the highest level of belief shared by all monotheistic faiths. For Schleiermacher, the non-Christian religions are wrong because they are arrested in an inferior stage of development. "It can therefore justly be said," Schleiermacher explained, "that as soon as piety has anywhere developed to the point of belief in one God over all, it may be predicted that man will not in any region of the earth remain stationary on one of the lower planes."<sup>51</sup>

By placing the source for religious truth within human experience, Schleiermacher constructed a system whose "teleological end" was discovery of the self, a self which was the extension of the world, the Universe, and of God.<sup>52</sup> Essentially, Schleiermacher conflates the terms "self-

consciousness" and "God-consciousness," leaving his interpreters to grapple with the question of where theology begins and anthropology ends in his systematic theology. Schleiermacher gained a significant benefit from his method—a theology attractive to modernism. His method intentionally operated at a highly aggressive level, so aggressive that every doctrine within the system *by necessity* drastically accommodated itself to its organizing principle. Schleiermacher's uniform application of his method so overwhelmed his system that few of his followers missed its lack of objective referents that were once so characteristic of Protestant theology.

### **Critical Issue in Schleiermacher's Thought: Consciousness and the Nature of Doctrine**

As the "father of modern theology," Schleiermacher forsakes the theological precedents set by his forebears. By beginning his *Glaubenslehre* with an ecclesiological focus ("we must begin with a conception of the Christian Church, in order to define in accordance therewith what Dogmatics should be") Schleiermacher makes it clear that, unlike Calvin's *The Institutes*, his work does not propose to be a theology of revelation.<sup>53</sup> Calvin begins *The Institutes* with the assertion that theology must start with the knowledge of God the Redeemer. But as quickly as Calvin introduces the subject, he demonstrates that all human attempts to comprehend God come to nothing. Consequently, *The Institutes* begins with a helpless humanity desperately in need of God's own self-disclosure, a revelation external from the world of fallen human beings. This God accomplishes through his gift of the Scriptures, the only source

whereby "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself."<sup>54</sup>

In stark contrast to Calvin, Schleiermacher by his own admission avows the *Glaubenslehre* to be a theology of inward reflection, of relationship, and of shared consciousness. Displacing the metaphysics of scriptural revelation for the sensuous impressions of consciousness, Schleiermacher denies any notion that revelation entails a body of doctrinal propositions.<sup>55</sup> He asserts,

I am unwilling to accept the further definition that it [divine communication] operates upon man as a cognitive being. For that would make revelation to be originally and essentially doctrine; and I do not believe that we can adopt that position, whether we consider the whole field covered by the idea, or seek to define it in advance with special reference to Christianity. If a system of propositions can be understood from their connexion with others, then nothing supernatural was required for their production. But if they cannot, then they can, in the first instance, only be apprehended ...as part of another whole, as a moment of the life of a thinking being who works upon us directly as a distinctive existence by means of his total impression on us; and this working is always a working upon the self-consciousness.<sup>56</sup>

Not only does Schleiermacher reject the idea that revelation imparts doctrine in this passage, but he significantly alters the *locus* for divine communication. For Schleiermacher, Scripture does not mediate God's self-revelation to human beings. Instead, God communicates directly to the self-consciousness of the human beings. This communication comes in the form of impressions, not intelligible sentences. As a result, Schleiermacher sees every human being as a positive receptor of divine revelation. He writes, "therefore it may truly

be said even of the imperfect forms of religion...that they rest upon revelation, however much error may be mingled in them with the truth."<sup>57</sup>

With revelation conceived in this way and doctrine construed in this fashion, every subsequent doctrine in *Glaubenslehre* receives a radical revision. With respect to the doctrine of God, Schleiermacher averts any traditional discussion of the issue, bizarrely treating his largest section on God under the section "explication of the consciousness of sin."<sup>58</sup> In fact, Schleiermacher avoids a sustained reflection of theism. Schleiermacher's consignment of truth to the self-consciousness, to feeling and relationship, frames every doctrine in such a way as to limit its expression to human feeling. Consequently, doctrine in Schleiermacher's system lacks an external referent, an ontological truth status that denotes that the doctrine describes something objective about God and his ways of interacting from the world. With regard to the attributes of God, Schleiermacher clearly makes this very point in §50: "All attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something special in God, but only something special in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to Him."<sup>59</sup> Stated differently, knowledge of God for Schleiermacher does not objectively correspond to the person of God himself, but only offers us an ostensive internal reference to the self-consciousness.<sup>60</sup>

Schleiermacher's treatment of the Trinity serves as the most infamous example of his approach to doctrinal formulation. Traditionally considered in the first section of theological explication after the doctrine of revelation, Schleiermacher consigns the doctrine of the Trinity to little

better than a footnote in his system. Speaking of the Trinity, Schleiermacher explained, "this doctrine itself, as ecclesiastically framed, is not an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness, but only a combination of several such utterances."<sup>61</sup> The reason for Schleiermacher's displacement of the doctrine immediately surfaces: the Trinity does not arise naturally from the human consciousness, and therefore must be regarded as an issue of subordinate importance.

After recovering from the initial shock of Schleiermacher's casual devaluation of the doctrine which produced seven ecumenical councils and numerous creeds, one recognizes that Schleiermacher's treatment of the Trinity simply follows his methodology for the nature and formulation of Christian doctrine. Schleiermacher torturously struggles even to discuss the Trinity, and finally admits that in his view, one must sacrifice either a unity of Persons or of essence, despite the witness of the history of the Church to the contrary:

The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity demands that we think of each of the three Persons as equal to the Divine Essence, and vice versa, and each of the three Persons as equal to the others. Yet we cannot do either the one or the other, but can only represent the Persons in a gradation, and thus either represent the unity of the Essence as less real than the three Persons, or vice versa.<sup>62</sup>

Dissatisfied with the doctrine of the Trinity, and frustrated by its unwillingness to fit into his system, Schleiermacher expresses hope that the doctrine can be reordered so as to accommodate the consciousness of the human being, the universal principle of doctrinal interpretation.<sup>63</sup> He writes, "We have the less reason

to regard this doctrine as finally settled since it did not receive any fresh treatment when the Evangelical (Protestant) Church was set up; and so there must still be more in store for it a transformation which will go back to its very beginnings."<sup>64</sup>

By interiorizing Christian doctrine within human experience, Schleiermacher sacrifices God's transcendence and the foundation of the biblical metaphysic. Therefore one might be scandalized, but not surprised, that Schleiermacher cannot reconcile the Trinity with his theological method. God as transcendent Sovereign does not exist in Schleiermacher's theology; he appears only as an abstraction, "the divine causality" which provides a cohesive fabric to the Universe. Karl Barth called Schleiermacher's God "a neuter," not a person, but a "thing." Barth remarked regarding Schleiermacher's account of God, "God is given to us in feeling. Not given to us externally, as Schleiermacher assures us at length. But surely the neuter that is posited and given is obviously not Spirit, not God, but, no matter how abstract, a thing."<sup>65</sup> Barth was correct. Despite his emphasis on relationship, Schleiermacher does not present God as Father, or even fundamentally as Person.

Schleiermacher focuses his attention primarily on the person of Jesus Christ and the believer's relationship with him. But like every doctrine in his system, his consideration of the person of Christ undergoes a drastic transformation. For Schleiermacher, Jesus of Nazareth achieves his place of high honor not because he is the second person of the Godhead, but because he possessed the highest form of God- or self-consciousness. Richard R. Niebuhr comments that Schleiermacher "present[s] the figure of

Christ not as the 'celestial' but as the historical 'intelligence' that seeks to bring this anarchic inner world under the government of its motions."<sup>66</sup>

According to Schleiermacher, Christ is the *Urbild*, the perfect or ideal man who shows humanity the way to God through reliance on the feeling of absolute dependence. Despite Schleiermacher's denial of Jesus' full deity, he enthusiastically affirms his humanity to the end that all of humanity might participate in his example. "For this Second Adam is altogether like all those who are descended from the first, only that from the outset He has an absolutely potent God-consciousness."<sup>67</sup> Again, "The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him."<sup>68</sup> With self-, religious-, or God-consciousness as the only pole of theological reference, every doctrine emanates from a variation on that theme. Schleiermacher defines sin as a denial of the feeling of absolute dependence. Redemption is construed as Christ's rescuing us from this denial: "The Redeemer assumes believers into the power of His God-consciousness, and this is his redemptive activity."<sup>69</sup> As expected, this definition of Christ's salvific work defies an orthodox definition due to Schleiermacher's novel recasting of meaning in Christian doctrine. Schleiermacher makes no mention of Christ's coequality with the Father, *homoousios*, God of very God, because *homoousios* connotes a metaphysical status about the person of Christ.

Throughout his work, Schleiermacher carefully avoids making metaphysical pronouncements as they relate to the Godhead, and rejects such statements as

they relate to issues such as miracles. Schleiermacher critiques miracles on pragmatic, epistemological, and metaphysical grounds.<sup>70</sup> He objects to the concept of any necessity for the supernatural in religion: "It can never be necessary in the interest of religion so as to interpret a fact that its dependence on God absolutely excludes its being conditioned by Nature."<sup>71</sup> As Schleiermacher wrote to Lücke, "As for the miracles in the New Testament...it will not be long before they fall once more."<sup>72</sup> Of course, Schleiermacher claims this because in a doctrinal system predicated on consciousness, one does not need external or transcendent categories to accomplish human perfection in feeling and sensation. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Schleiermacher remains unmistakably a Kantian slave.<sup>73</sup> Since we cannot actually know things-in-themselves, Schleiermacher thought, why flatter metaphysics by dwelling on the unattainable?<sup>74</sup> Schleiermacher interiorized every subject within feeling, and thus feeling served as theology's revelatory principle. As such, Schleiermacher deemed feeling "a revelation of the inward."<sup>75</sup> Protestant metaphysics as historically employed never entered the equation.

### **Assessment of Schleiermacher's Theological Method and Its Impact**

Throughout this discussion, I have traced Friedrich Schleiermacher's systematic interiorization of doctrine into the religious self-consciousness. While many interpreters of Schleiermacher have regarded him as a hero of modernity for his significant restatement of the faith, I argued that his life and work were a simple outworking of an early and avowed denial of doctrines central to

Christianity occasioned by early modernity. Having never retracted this denial, and given his massive redefinition of the entire landscape of Christian theology, I suggested the possibility that Schleiermacher (whether intentionally or unintentionally) constructed a way for Christian theology to make an apology for the heterodoxy of modernity. His theology transformed the faith as opposed to translating it.<sup>76</sup>

Schleiermacher's theological system brilliantly and consistently employed an epistemology worthy of the greatest philosophers of his age. By critically interacting with and against the philosophical options available to him, he constructed a theological method that kept the Enlightenment at bay while simultaneously mollifying the cultured despisers of religion. By framing his discussion within the life of the Christian community, Schleiermacher found a mode of discourse to see the Church life which he had grown to love survive his own generation. In many respects, Schleiermacher was every bit the champion, a "prince of the Church."

Still, Schleiermacher remains a Janus-faced theologian. By retreating into the safety of the self-consciousness in order to save religion, Schleiermacher severed the Church from the referent that made its own internal dialogue the vibrant process he so admired. As this essay has shown, Schleiermacher's doctrines do not claim to be the personal verbal witness of a self-revealing God.<sup>77</sup> James B. Torrance expressed the thoughts of many interpreters of Schleiermacher when he queried, "if faith is defined non-cognitively as the feeling of absolute dependence, and carefully distinguished from any kind of subject-object relationship, how is it possible to do adequate justice to the truth content

of Christian doctrine?"<sup>78</sup>

Actually, it is a question that Schleiermacher clearly answered in his construal of consciousness and the nature of doctrine. For Schleiermacher, "truth content" is an unfortunate category mistake that indicates a failure to ask the right questions of religion and theology. Truth content presupposes transcendent revelation, an objective means of verification, and a body of propositional truths, all of which Schleiermacher expressly denied. His theology made simple claims of coherence, not correspondence. "Dogmatics," he writes, "stays within its limits and seeks to be nothing more than a suitable and skillful arrangement of what is simultaneously present and mutually interrelated."<sup>79</sup> Schleiermacher constructed a theology of limits (consciousness) not metaphysics (revelation).

Schleiermacher irrevocably changed the theological landscape of Protestantism. Conventional wisdom holds that *The Christian Faith* was the most significant theological work since Calvin's *Institutes*. Schleiermacher made every subsequent form of liberal theology possible. No one in the nineteenth century met Schleiermacher's challenge with a statement of theology that even approached the breadth and scope of his work. As Karl Barth remarked, "Not until E. Brunner in 1924 did anyone write against Schleiermacher with presuppositions that were really different (even if they were perhaps only relatively free from Schleiermacher!)." <sup>80</sup> Barth may have just as well included himself in that statement. As Richard Niebuhr and many others have concluded, Barth never totally broke from the liberalism of Schleiermacher. Nevertheless, the latter's conflation of nature and grace so disturbed Barth that much

of the work from his dialectical phase seems to be his attempt to exorcise Schleiermacher's theological demons.

Despite the withering criticism that he received from Barth within, and from the post-World War II neo-evangelicals without, Schleiermacher's theology has seen a reversal of fortunes in recent years. Approbation for Schleiermacher comes increasingly from an unlikely front: evangelicalism. In his 1990 Bampton Lectures, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, Alister McGrath claims that George Lindbeck mislabeled Schleiermacher as an "experiential-expressivist" in *The Nature of Doctrine*.<sup>81</sup> McGrath argues, "Schleiermacher is arguably closer to Lindbeck's notion of a 'cultural-linguistic' approach to doctrine on account of his emphasis on the role of the community of faith."<sup>82</sup> Since McGrath views church tradition as such a critical part of the "hermeneutical spiral" in doctrinal development, McGrath views Schleiermacher as more friend than foe in his understanding of the construction of doctrine. Further, in his book *The Making of Modern German Christology*, McGrath applauds Schleiermacher's theology for being "Christ-centered."<sup>83</sup> Although McGrath's appropriation of Schleiermacher falls short of a ringing commendation, his placement of Schleiermacher's theological hermeneutics within the parameters of Lindbeck's postliberal position enhances the likelihood of a revival of Schleiermacher among those evangelicals enamored with all things postliberal.

The recent anti-foundationalist and pietist emphases within evangelicalism should also help Schleiermacher once again emerge from the shadows. Between Clark Pinnock's current exaltation of experience in theological formulation and

Stanley Grenz's current fascination with Pietism as the evangelical essential, it is only a matter of time before evangelical theologians increase their appropriation of Schleiermacher. More concrete examples exist. Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm's recent *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* contains an article by Nicola Creegan entitled, "Schleiermacher as Apologist: Reclaiming the Father of Modern Theology." Creegan argues that in a post-modern world that recognizes only subjectivist claims to truth, the need for an individualist account of Christianity makes Schleiermacher's approach made to order for our times. With anti-propositionalist and anti-foundationalist Evangelicals on the rise, the reclamation of Schleiermacher has already begun.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1961* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966) 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> E. Y. Mullins, "Outline of Lectures to Graduate Theology Class, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," TMs, p. 45, Special Collections, James P. Boyce Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966) 21.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) xi.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 31.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Otto, "Introduction," in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) vii.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) xiii. Barth further remarked concerning Schleiermacher's achievement, "The first place in a history of the theology of the most recent times belongs and will always belong to Schleiermacher, and he has no rival. ...Nobody can say today whether we have really overcome his influence, or whether we are still at heart children of his age.... One is more strongly impressed every time one considers him—by the wealth and magnitude of the tasks he sets himself, by the moral and intellectual equipment with which he approached them, by the manly steadfastness with which he trod the path he had once embarked upon right to the end as he entered upon it, unheeded of the favor or disfavor of each passing decade, and endowing it by this very playfulness with the ultimate reality of all true art. We have to do here with a hero, the like of which is but seldom bestowed upon theology."

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Friedrich Schleiermacher, As Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters, Vol. 1*, trans. Frederica Rowan (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1860) 46. Brian A. Gerrish is the only major biographer of Schleiermacher to make reference to this important statement in Schleiermacher's let-

ters. After excoriating Schleiermacher's father for his negative reaction to this statement, Gerrish seeks to explain this admission as the beginnings of a new, more substantive faith for Friedrich Schleiermacher. Gerrish states, "If we did trace the story to its conclusion, we would have to decide that what Schleiermacher lost was not his faith in Christ but his first understanding of it." See Brian Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 26. Gerrish's dismissive comment is far from satisfactory, and obscures the weight of this admission from Schleiermacher, an admission which he never rescinded nor repented of. To merely state that Schleiermacher's denial of the deity of Christ was an entrée into a more profound faith seriously devalues the importance of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith. The truth is that Schleiermacher radically redefined his understanding of Christ so as to be utterly distinct and contrary to the Christology of historic Christianity.

<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 258.

<sup>12</sup> William C. Fletcher, *The Moderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 22.

<sup>13</sup> Terrence N. Tice, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995) 716.

<sup>14</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974) 99.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard Univ. Press, 1969) 292.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies*, trans. Horace Leland Friess (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1926) 30.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 83.

<sup>18</sup> For further consideration of the relationship between Semler and Schleiermacher's understanding of the theological task, see Trutz Rendtorff, *Church and Theology*, trans. Reginald Fuller (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>19</sup> Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher sought to explain himself *vis-à-vis* his comments on pantheism in his letters to Lücke. See Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> Richard B. Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher: The Development of His Theory of Scientific and Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941) 36.

<sup>22</sup> Schleiermacher, *Life of Schleiermacher*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990) 356.

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1902) 51.

<sup>25</sup> To be certain, Schleiermacher's rejection of Kant's theory of ethics as the only path into theological dis-

course deserves substantive attention, and has been treated significantly elsewhere. The primary text in this regard is Schleiermacher's own *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, trans. John C. Shelley (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). For secondary considerations of this issue, see William Alexander Johnson, *On Religion: A Study of Theological Method in Schleiermacher and Nygren* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1964). In addition, for a nice summary of Schleiermacher's own philosophical method, see Hugh Ross Mackintosh's classic, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd, 1937) 36-43.

<sup>26</sup>Jacques Barzun, *Romanticism and the Modern Ego* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1947) 132.

<sup>27</sup>For an assessment of Schlegel and Schleiermacher's relationship to romanticism, see Jack Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

<sup>28</sup>Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976) 43.

<sup>29</sup>Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 1.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Brian A. Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* eds. Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Steven Katz, and Patrick Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

<sup>32</sup>Harry Yeide, Jr. *Studies in Classical Pietism: The Flowering of the Ecclesiola* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 25.

<sup>33</sup>I am referring in particular to

Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §196-231.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, §203-204.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, §205-208. In §208, Schleiermacher states, "Every dogmatic theologian who either innovates or exalts what is old, in a one-sided manner, is only a very imperfect organ of the Church. From a falsely heterodox standpoint, he will declare even the most impeccable orthodoxy to be false; and from a falsely orthodox standpoint, he will combat even the most mild and inevitable heterodoxy as a destructive innovation."

<sup>36</sup>Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 18.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>39</sup>See pages 5 and 6 of this essay.

<sup>40</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, eds. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) §19.2.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, §15.

<sup>42</sup>The point I am arguing here is confirmed by Richard R. Niebuhr: "The religion that Schleiermacher described in this way is a purely formal and abstract religion, which exists nowhere in actuality...he insisted that religion always appears in a particular social and historical form." See Richard R. Niebuhr, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. and The Free Press, 1967) 318.

<sup>43</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §3.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, §9.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, §10.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, §12.

<sup>49</sup>Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972) 66.

<sup>50</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §6.1.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, §8.3.

<sup>52</sup>Schleiermacher occasionally uses the word "Universe" in the same way he employs the word "God."

<sup>53</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §2.2.

<sup>54</sup>John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. XX. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950) I.vi.1.

<sup>55</sup>Apologists for Schleiermacher will rightly point to §27 as evidence of Schleiermacher's regard for Scripture in the statement of faith. §27 reads, "All propositions which claim a place in the epitome of Evangelical (Protestant) doctrine must approve themselves both by appeal to Evangelical confessional documents, or in default to these, to the New Testament Scriptures, and by exhibition of their homogeneity with other propositions already recognized." Three observations might be made in this regard. First, despite the fact that Schleiermacher claims the importance of Scripture in theological formulation, he betrays his statement by subordinating the doctrine of revelation to a sub-sub category in his system of thought. Secondly, given the fact that Schleiermacher denies that Scriptural revelation actually reveals doctrine and exalts the consciousness

as the focal point of God's communication to humanity, one need question what positive role Scripture could play in such a system. Finally, §27 speaks of the importance of Scripture to Evangelical or Protestant theology. Having understood Schleiermacher's heavy stress of the role of community in the articulation of doctrine, this statement likely means nothing more than the fact that Scripture is important to Evangelical theology because Evangelical theology grants Scripture that place of authority.

<sup>56</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §10.3.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., §50-56. For a more detailed consideration of this issue, see Robert R. Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian: The Construction of the Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). The unique contribution of this work lies in its suggestion that Schleiermacher was a proto-phenomenologist who focused on the structures of meaning rather than existence.

<sup>59</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §50.

<sup>60</sup>This proposal by Schleiermacher—the construal of truth as ostensive rather than objective—is a characteristic statement by twentieth century postliberals. An example of this can be seen in William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1996). Placher essentially argues that human language is incapable of speaking univocally about God. Moreover, he disclaims the ability of theology to speak ana-

logically about God. Using Calvin as an example of this approach, Placher cites Tom Torrance who says that knowledge of God in Calvin "is *ostensive* and *persuasive*, but not *descriptive*. They point us toward God and help to move us toward lives of humility and obedience before God, but they do not purport to offer accounts of his nature." (58) The truth is that this was not the perspective of Calvin, but Schleiermacher.

<sup>61</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §170.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., §171.

<sup>63</sup>Schleiermacher expresses sympathy for the poor Unitarians in Great Britain and America who simply cannot accept the traditional Nicene and Chalcedonian pronouncements regarding the Trinity: "It is natural that people who cannot reconcile themselves to the difficulties and imperfections that cling to the formulae current in Trinitarian doctrine should say that they repudiate everything connected with it, whereas in point of fact their piety is by no means lacking in the specifically Christian stamp. This is the case often enough at the present moment not only in the Unitarian societies of England and America, but also among the scattered opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity in our own country. That circumstance supplies a further reason why we should strive to secure freedom for a thoroughgoing criticism of the doctrine in its older form, so as to prepare the way for, and introduce, a reconstruction of it corresponding to the present condition

of other related doctrines" (§172.2).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., §172.

<sup>65</sup>Barth, 217.

<sup>66</sup>Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, The Library of Philosophy and Theology, eds. John McIntyre and Ian T. Ramsey (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1965) 210.

<sup>67</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §89.2.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., §94.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., §100.

<sup>70</sup>For a detailed consideration of this area of Schleiermacher's thought, see William A. Dembski, "Schleiermacher's Metaphysical Critique of Miracles," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 49:4 (1996) 443-465.

<sup>71</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §47.

<sup>72</sup>Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 61.

<sup>73</sup>Along these lines, Nicholas Wolterstorff's recent article "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" takes up the issue of modern theology's existence under the long shadow of the philosopher from Königsberg. See *Modern Theology* 14:1 (January 1998) 1-18.

<sup>74</sup>In this sense, we may view Kant as Schleiermacher's superior. Kant at least was willing to attempt a knowledge of metaphysical categories, despite the obstacles. But perhaps in the final analysis, Schleiermacher was more honest. If epistemological certainty of metaphysical categories is impossible, then avoid a discussion of them altogether.

<sup>75</sup>Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §6.2.

<sup>76</sup>Millard Erickson's now familiar typology for theology fits Schleiermacher's approach.

<sup>77</sup>This point is clearly demonstrated in his tacit rejection of the revelatory witness of the Old Testament.

<sup>78</sup>James B. Torrance, "Schleiermacher's Theology: Some Questions," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (1968) 273.

<sup>79</sup>Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 69.

<sup>80</sup>Karl Barth, as cited in Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church*, 20.

<sup>81</sup>See Chapter 2 of Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>82</sup>Alister McGrath, "Doctrine and Dogma," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993) 117.

<sup>83</sup>Alister McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: 1750-1990* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 49.